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TITLE: Outcome Evaluation of the Women's Initiative for Sexual Health: Preintervention Data

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: The Women's Initiative for Sexual Health (WISH) is a comprehensive, culturally-specific sexuality education intervention targeting African American women in Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN. This intervention is a collaboration between a university-based human sexuality center and three African-American community agencies. The outcome evaluation assesses the effectiveness of this program in promoting healthy sexual behavior with an emphasis on HIV prevention.

METHODS: WISH participants were randomly assigned to either a two-day sexual health seminar or control group. All participants (intervention and controls) were administered a two hour in-depth interview at preintervention, and at three- and nine-month follow-ups. In addition, intervention participants (only) completed a self-administered questionnaire immediately following the intervention. The in-depth interview consisted of 42 sections including demographics, cultural variables, sexual attitudes and behaviors, sexual assertiveness, and attitudes toward and experience with safer sex activities. Data are currently being analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS.

RESULTS: This presentation will describe only the preintervention data (N=218). Eighty percent of women in the sample described themselves as African American with a mean age of 34 years. Forty-eight percent of participants lived below the poverty level with 33% in subsidized housing/halfway house/homeless. Most (51%) had been arrested at least once, and nearly half (46%) had been incarcerated. Regarding chemical use, 24% reported currently using some chemical other than tobacco or alcohol (e.g., cocaine, pot, heroin). Nearly one-third (32%) were currently in chemical dependence treatment. Regarding sexual behaviors, nearly three-quarters (73%) indicated having been sexually or physically abused, 30% had ever exchanged sex for drugs, money, food, rent, etc., and 12% were currently making money through prostitution. Compared to a national sample (NHSLs, 1994), the women in our study had a larger number of sex partners. The majority of WISH participants (57%) indicated "frequently" or "very frequently" NOT using a condom during sexual intercourse with their main partner, and 25% indicated the same lack of condom use with other partners. Forty-five percent of women indicated knowing or suspecting that their primary sex partner had not been monogamous. Group t-tests were run on all variables to determine similarity between intervention and control groups prior to the intervention. Both groups were similar on nearly all variables prior to the intervention.

CONCLUSIONS: While only 2-4% of the population in MN is African American, this collaboration resulted in the successful recruitment of a group of primarily African American women who were at substantial risk for drug-related and/or sexually transmitted HIV.

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